

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 04133 101514Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----024015 101530Z /45
O 101508Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7452

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 04133

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PPDC, US, PN
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE FOR ARIAS

REF: STATE 147776

1. IT IS MY CONSIDERED VIEW THAT ANY MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT TO ARNULFO ARIAS WOULD BE A GRAVE MISTAKE AT THIS TIME. IT WOULD, WITH ALMOST TOTAL CERTAINTY, EMBROIL US AT A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE MOMENT IN THE MOST INTIMATE INTERNAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF THIS COUNTRY. IF IT WERE FRIENDLY, IT WOULD BE USED AGAINST THE EXISTING GOVERNMENT. IF IT WERE THREATENING, IT WOULD BE USED AGAINST BOTH US AND THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT. AND IF IT WERE NEITHER, IT WOULD STILL BE USED TO BOLSTER ARIAS' PRESTIGE.

2. LET US BE CLEAR: ARIAS IS RETURNING TO PANAMA WITH EVERY INTENTION OF TRYING TO UNDERCUT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND, SOONER OR LATER, TO DESTROY IT. ANY APPROACH AT THIS TIME FROM OUR HIGHEST AUTHORITY TO ARIAS WOULD BE USED EITHER TO PROVE U.S. SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT OR, CONVERSELY, TO APPEAL TO ANTI-AMERICAN AND NATIONALIST SENTIMENTS.

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3. WASHINGTON SHOULD KNOW THAT IT WOULD BE NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TO SEND ANY MESSAGE TO ARIAS WITHOUT THE GOVERNMENT KNOWING ABOUT IT. AND NOT JUST ABOUT THE DELIVERY, BUT ABOUT THE CONTENT. WE CAN ALSO BE CERTAIN THAT ANY MESSAGE WOULD FIND ITS WAY INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN VERY PROMPTLY--IF FRIENDLY TO ARIAS, BY THE PANAMENISTAS; IF UNFRIENDLY, BY THE GOVERNMENT OR THE

PANAMENISTAS.

4. BEFORE ANY MESSAGE WERE PREPARED AND SENT, THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

A) ARNULFO ARIAS IS NOT A GENUINE FRIEND OF THE U.S.

HIS PRO-FASCIST TENDENCIES IN THE LATE 1930'S AND EARLY 1940'S ARE WELL KNOWN--AND LED TO HIS FIRST OUSTER (WITH OUR APPLAUSE). HE IS REGARDED WITH DEEP SUSPICION BY MANY BLACKS, CHINESE, INDIANS, AND JEWS.

B) ANY FRIENDLY GESTURE IN THE DIRECTION OF ARIAS WOULD UNDERCUT TORRIJOS AND BE VIEWED BY HIM WITH INCREDULITY AND BITTERNESS.

C) THE VERY FACT OF A MESSAGE TO THE FORMER PRESIDENT WOULD VERY QUICKLY BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND BE WIDELY INTERPRETED AS INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS--WHATEVER THE COMMENTS.

D) ANY APPROACH TO ARIAS WOULD BE DEEPLY RESENTED WITHIN THE GUARDIA NACIONAL (THE FOUNDATION OF TORRIJOS. STRENGTH), MANY OF WHOSE SENIOR OFFICERS RECALL ARIAS'

EFFORTS TO OUST OR DESTROY THEM, AND HIS ALLEGED MURDER OF TWO OF THEM.

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E) FINALLY, ANY INDICATIONS OF FRIENDLINESS TOWARD ARIAS AND HIS PANAMENISTAS WOULD DO MUCH TO UNDERCUT THE OPPOSITION LIBERAL PARTY WHICH IS THE CLOSEST THING IN THIS COUNTRY TO A TRULY DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL GROUPING.

F) CONVERSELY, A STERN OR WARNING MESSAGE WOULD BE USED TO ENHANCE ARIAS' NATIONALIST CREDENTIALS.

5. IN SUM, I AM UNALTERABLY OPPOSED TO ANY MESSAGE TO ARIAS. IT CAN DO NO GOOD AND CAN DO INCREDIBLE HARM. IF THAT JUDGEMENT WERE OVERRULED BY HIGHER AUTHORITY, I WOULD HAVE TO JUDGE THE METHOD OF DELIVERY BY THE CONTENTS. I WOULD NOT DELIVER IT MYSELF. JORDEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATIONS, POLITICAL LEADERS, OPPOSITION PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PANAMA04133
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780243-0610
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780673/aaaackrr.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 42afb8b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 STATE 147776
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2405260
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE FOR ARIAS
TAGS: PPDC, US, PN, (CARTER, JIMMY), (ARIAS, ARNULFO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/42afb8b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014